



Two weeks ago, Jonathan laid a foundation for this series, and then last Sunday we finally experienced winter and had a snow day! This morning, I'm going to try to continue to lay a foundation for this series. I'm also wanting to keep relatively on track with our schedule; so, I've packed this sermon. Originally, this sermon was going to focus on the first phrase in Acts 2:42. Now, it's going to focus on the first and last: devoting ourselves to the apostle's doctrine and prayer. So, let's start off with the main idea: **Local churches are called to together think differently than the world around us because we commune with the Lord.**

Now, let's take a step back to evaluate the title of this series again. "Church in the End Times." In the Scriptures, we're taught that the end times can be one of two things. It either refers to the time between Jesus' ascension into Heaven and his Second Coming or it refers to the final judgments immediately before Jesus comes again. Now, what does this phrase mean in this series? Both. Whether we are in the end-end times or in the end times, we need to know how God has called us to live in this world because God has called us not simply to be different, but to be completely different from the world. Our thinking and actions should reveal desires about us that run contrary to the world's ways precisely because we know God and fellowship with him.

Jesus himself told us that we are to be salt in this world. But what does that mean? Like salt brings out the flavors of something, so we being salt means we reveal the satisfying taste of the Lord. The question is, "Are we doing this in this 21st century world? In Holland, MI?" Jesus warns his followers that we can lose our savoriness. Are we losing it? How do we know if we have? What do we do if we have? That's what this series is about – and so much more. I pray God uses this series to compel us to live as the salt we are – savoring Jesus together and revealing his glory to the world.

So, I want to start out my sermon today by talking about the contrast God calls us to with the world. We are to be different. But in order to be different, we have to know what the cultural norm is.

1. How does the world think?

In other words, how does our world operate and think. A couple years ago, I went through a huge philosophical book called, "The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self," written by a guy named Carl Trueman. As I was listening to the audiobook, there were many times my head hurt and my brain just felt like it was stalling because of the intensity of what he was communicating. But I knew that what he was saying was gold. The purpose of his book was to show how, over the last four hundred years, we've gotten to this point in history where people think their feelings define who they are at the core of their being.

¹ This manuscript is a rough draft. To get the full ideas and/or corrections to this manuscript, please listen to the audio version via our church's website (www.venturabaptistchurch.com), our Apple Podcast, or our YouTube page.

As a pastor, I would say that I see this not only in the culture around us, but among professing Christians as well. Our feelings and emotions become the highest priority in defining “our reality.” And so, after Jonathan’s sermon last week, when I got home, I said to some of my children, “There was one thing Jonathan said today that I hope that *everyone* understood and would apply.” Do you have a guess? It was this, **We need to not only think about what we think about. We need to think about how we think about what we think about.** In other words, we are always interpreting everything we see around us. When people act a certain way, we interpret what that means. And our interpretations could be way off.

I think that should lead us to say, “How do I think about what I think about?” The philosopher Charles Taylor says that our culture is given over to “expressive individualism.” This is simply **“the idea that in order to be fulfilled, in order to be an authentic person, in order to be genuinely me, I need to be able to express outwardly or perform publicly that which I feel I am inside”** (Trueman via www.crossway.org *What Does It Mean to Be Your True Self?* November 25, 2020). Basically put, the general western cultural mindset is that my feelings define reality.

And I think most, if not all of us, would affirm that we see our culture living this way. If something causes emotional problems, or our feelings affirm something; people think they must follow this in order to be authentic to themselves. To believe in themselves is to embrace what they feel inside. And that’s why I think we see so much chaos in this world. And this affirms the apostle Paul’s words to Timothy when he talks about the end times: **But know this: Hard times will come in the last days. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, demeaning, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good, ⁴ traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to the form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid these people.**² There’s so much I could unpack in these verses, but just notice “lovers of self. . .without love for what is good. . .lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. . .” Do we see this in our world?

Now, I want to press this. Do you think you base a lot of your decisions on how you feel or even on your emotions? Let’s look to a different church as an example for us. Let’s think about the New Testament **church of Corinth**. Many of us know that Corinth had a lot of issues, a lot of disagreements and disunity – and it was because Corinth was living on the basis of their own culture’s way of thinking. It was kind of like Corinth kept the cultural way of thinking and they brought Jesus in to make them a little better. So, do you know one of the first issues Paul addresses with Corinth and calls them carnal and fleshly because of it? Answer: evaluating **who’s the best preacher**. Some liked Paul. Others liked Apollos. Others still Cephas. Now, I want you to think about Corinth. I doubt they were in a room arguing with each other. I imagine they simply emphasized who they thought was best, but Paul says it’s fleshly because it was taking people’s eyes off of Christ – emphasizing the preacher above Jesus.

Now, let’s apply to us today. I can imagine someone saying something like, “I really like it when David preaches because. . .” Or, “I love it when Mark gives bulletpoints.” Or, “Ugh, there Timothy goes doing that thing again.” Still others of you could say, “Can Caique come back?!” Now you may not say it in ways that are trying to put down others. You could be saying, “I just want Jesus proclaimed most clearly and attractively to people! That’s why I like this person!” It seems your desire is for Jesus, but ask yourself, “How much did your feelings play into your final decision?” Did your feelings reign higher than

² [Christian Standard Bible](http://www.christianstandardbible.com) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), 2 Ti 3:1–5.

the proclamation of Jesus? Do you see *how* you think about something is even more important than what you think?

Think about another issue with Corinth: **spiritual gifts**. I think our expressive individualistic society talks about spiritual gifts in similar ways that Corinth did. They emphasize themselves and how the gift makes them feel and think about others. We can say that because we're gifted in something, I serve you by ensuring you embrace my gift and let me do what I think is best. If you don't affirm me in my feelings of my gift, then I feel you've rejected me. But Paul corrects the Corinthians by giving the body illustration. And let me extend the illustration. Let's say you're gifted to be the eye. What if you say, "My gift is seeing, and the best way for me to see everything is to jump out of the socket so I can see all directions?!" And we can say that we just want to help. But if an eye stays out of the eye socket, infection will enter. The eyeball will dry out. Going back to Paul's illustration, he says we can't say we don't need each other. If we're making decisions about our gifting on the basis of ourselves or our own feelings about our gifting, we're not showing our need for the body. And Paul goes on to say that's not love because you're not loving Christ's body, and you're not really thinking about serving. You're thinking about how you emphasize you. How do you think about your giftings and how do you think about serving others? Is it more based on your internal feelings or emotions (even thinking you're just wanting to glorify God) or is it based on the reality of what God says?

As a pastor, I tend to think that many (or maybe even most) professing Christians live a lot of our lives this way, and we don't confront how we think about what we think about. We can base our relationship with the Lord on how we feel. We can base our relationship with our spouses on how they "made us" feel or how we feel about them? Our relationship with other Christians is based in how they made us feel. And we evaluate preachers and ministries on how it makes us feel. All-in-all, that's a completely self-centric way of viewing things and that's so concerning because that's just thinking like the world. Of all people, Christians ought to be aware of this. As Jonathan said last Sunday, just because you or I became a Christ-follower doesn't mean that our interpretations are perfect. Instead, the apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 the following: **We demolish arguments⁵ and every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.**³ Ventura, part of our mission is to be aware that how we think (even now) still has problems and sins. Now, the next question is: how do we fight against this? Paul says it: take every thought captive to obey Christ. How we think must be subject to Jesus. This now leads to the next point:

2. How do we know when our thinking is different than the world?

How we think is tested and developed through how we treat one another in the local church context. I'm reminded of Paul's words to the Galatians church in Galatians 5:13-15: **¹³ For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement: Love your neighbor as yourself. ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another.**⁴

We were called to freedom. What does that freedom look like? The context here is not in how we treat people in general, **but by how and that we serve the others with whom we are one – the fellow Christians in the local church.** You see, you can say until you're blue in the face that you love others, but

³ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), 2 Co 10:4b–5.

⁴ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Ga 5:13–15.

how do you serve and live with real Christians in your local context? If Christ is central, then we will love who he loves. We will love the ones for whom he has died and calls his bride and his body. And as we love one another, we as salt will show the savoriness of Jesus. In these end times, Jesus really is the Savior and he's coming again! But if Christ is not central, then we will devour one another and our church will not magnify Christ. It will simply be a group of people who love their little soapboxes – and we'll be just like any other worldly gathering. Do you see *how* we think about what we think matters? Do you see how we think about Jesus leads to how we treat our local church? But here's the thing. We won't live this way and act this way unless we have been transformed by Jesus himself. Now we can enter into Acts 2. Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Act 2:42. Here, I want us to see another point:

3. The church is called to (together) commune with the Lord.

In Acts 2, after Peter preaches the gospel to the people in Jerusalem, we're told that about 3,000 people are baptized and added to the church in Jerusalem. That's significant growth in one day. There could be immense problems in that church because I'm sure they all had preferences and feelings and thoughts about this, that, and the other thing – just like the other New Testament churches we read about. Just like us. But we're told the follow in Acts 2:42: **42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.** ⁵

First, notice that the Spirit brought immediate unity: "They devoted themselves" together to the following things. Just like a body is made up of many parts, and a family isn't comprised of one, so the Spirit caused the people in Jerusalem to know they were united by something greater than their individual selves. And, as you continue reading in the passage, Luke writes that through this devotion, the church lived in such ways that shone the light of Christ, and in verse 47, we read, **"Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."**⁶

What do you think about the local church? How do you think about what you think about the local church? Many think in terms of how the atmosphere or people make them feel. But Acts 2:42 gives a picture of what we ought to do: we together devote ourselves to certain things. You and I are to devote ourselves together to the apostle's teaching, devote ourselves together to fellowship, devote ourselves together to the breaking of bread, and devote ourselves together to prayer. None of these are statements of individuality. That doesn't mean it's bad to do these alone (although you can't fellowship alone). But the emphasis is communal. They're all statements of the assembly to do together. Do you think of church in this way? Do you think of God's call to you to devote yourselves with the people here to these realities? You might be tempted to say, "But if I devote myself to these people, I'm going to be limited. I'm not going to be free to do whatever I want." Well, in some ways, that's true. If you define freedom as the opportunity to do whatever you feel like doing, the local church limits you – like sockets limit an eyeball. But praise God for sockets! And Paul says that freedom is living like Christ and serving.

Now, I believe that if you don't know the supreme worth and value of Jesus, you won't live this way. But if you have been saved by Jesus and you know who he is, you will increasingly reveal his glory. Instead of living on the basis of how you feel about things and how people and situations make you feel, you will live on the basis of seeking to know more of Christ and seeking to ignite a passion in others for Jesus.

⁵ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Ac 2:41–42.

⁶ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Ac 2:47.

I say all of this because, this is essentially the idea of devoting themselves to the apostle’s teaching and prayer. And this applies to us, too. **Together, Ventura, we must commune with the Lord.** But what do I mean by commune? When you look at Acts 2:42, you’ll see that the outer categories are related to each other, and the inner categories are related to each other. The outer categories have to do with the vertical relationship with God. The inner have to do with the horizontal relationships within the church. The outer holds the church together. And if a group of Christians aren’t communing with the Lord together, then it’s not functioning as God intends.

So, why do I say “commune” with God? It’s relational fellowship with God. Acts 2:42 isn’t simply saying that the church had good preaching and very ordered prayers. What’s the point of studying the Bible and praying? To grow in our relationship with God! So, do you gather with Christians to grow in knowing God more? Do you gather with believers to yearn to pray to the Lord together for one another?

Let’s break this down a little more, and I’m going to start with prayer. There’s a parable Jesus gives about a widow that won’t stop knocking on a judge’s door, asking for justice. Jesus concludes the parable asking if when he returns, will there be faith on the earth? Wait. Faith? I thought the parable was about persistence. No. It’s about who we trust. The church is different than the world. The world looks to rulers, politicians, doctors, degrees, street smarts, money, popularity – all sorts of things – to give them what they want. The church looks ultimately to God. And if we really look to God, how will that be expressed? Through prayer. We will talk with him, commune with him – even ask him to change our desires if they’re wrong. And we will do this not only alone, but together. Because a prayerless church is truly a lifeless church – a church that has an appearance of godliness but denying the power. A church family must together communicate with God.

The next point is the apostle’s teaching? What’s that? First, think about who the apostles are. They are the people to whom Jesus revealed himself. And they were taught by Jesus to go and teach. Jesus himself also tells them that the Spirit will guide them into all truth after he leaves. So, what did these apostles teach? They taught *how* Jesus taught them to teach. In Luke 24, Jesus says, ⁴⁴ . . . **“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”** ⁴⁵ **Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.**⁷ Jesus taught them that he is the point. Those of you in discipleship groups may recall John 5:39-40 when Jesus said, ³⁹ **You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me.**⁸ Jesus himself is eternal life. The point of everything is so that we would see and savor the Messiah, entrust ourselves to him, and be reconciled to our Triune God.

This was also the emphasis of the apostle Paul when he says to the Corinthians, ⁴² **I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**⁹ Paul isn’t saying that he doesn’t think about other things, but instead that everything is submissive to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our friendships, marriages, parenting. Seeing and knowing Jesus changes everything in the way we think, act, and will even affect our feelings, too. Together, Ventura, we must be Jesus-centered and focused. This is the contrast with the feelings-based system of our current world. But if you know that Jesus, God the Son, came and sacrificed all glory and took the punishment you deserve for your sins – and that he reigns now having conquered sin and death. And if you have been melted and moved by this Savior, and you know others have been as well – you are now a part of Christ’s body! And to be “authentic” or

⁷ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Lk 24:44–45.

⁸ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Jn 5:39.

⁹ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), 1 Co 2:2.

maybe better – to not be a hypocrite is to emphasize Jesus! By the way, this mean, we don't gather as Christians just to get information. Information is necessary, but what's the point if you don't want Jesus? What's the point if you don't glory in Jesus. Together, we must devote ourselves to help each other know Christ – to commune with him.

Now, how do we know if we really are helping each other in the apostle's doctrine? I believe it looks like devoting ourselves to the mantra ²¹ **For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**¹⁰ Let me merge this with the idea of Acts 2:42 – devoting to the doctrine of Jesus (the Messiah who fulfills all the OT to answer the in problem) and living in dependent prayer. To live is Christ and to die is gain is simply the expression of this. Or, to put another way: **Together, Ventura, we must die in our life, knowing we will live through our death.** What in the world does that mean?! Well, when we actually see how Paul, and the other apostles teach the applications of Christ, it's often (if not always) in ways talking about death to life. So, for example, after Paul says his mantra is "to live is Christ and to die is gain," he expresses what the mind of Messiah is. This mind is what he says has been given to every believer in Jesus. It's a mind that sacrifices like Jesus sacrifices even to the point of death. "Come and die" is the consistent message. Move to Corinthians and Paul talks to them about how much the Corinthians have hurt him but then he says it's an opportunity for him to know Jesus' sacrificial love for him and now he's free to love the Corinthians in this way.

Whoa! This is a contradictory way of thinking from the world. Because Christ solved the sin problem through taking God's wrath on himself and dying. And because he was only resurrected after he experienced this, the apostles continuously repeat this refrain as a way of life for us (with each other). So, to go back to what I said at the beginning, "Don't just think about what you think about. Think about how you think about what you think about." How do you think about Jesus? Is he just someone who helps you get an edge in this life so that you can feel better? If that's your Jesus, you're still thinking like the world. Or does Jesus change everything? Has he set you free to serve him and reveal his savoriness to the world with this church family? Can you imagine how we would grow in the faith if we lived this way and spoke this way? Can you imagine what people would think about Christians if our mantra was to live is to die, and to die is gain? People would be seeing God's love flowing through us.

As I say all of this, I'm reminded of an older song that I only discovered this past Fall. The lyrics are, **Verse 1: Nothing chills the heart of man//Like passing through death's gate//Yet to him who enters daily//Death's a glorious fate//Dearly beloved we are gathered here//To be a holy bride//And daily cross death's threshold//To the holy life inside// Chorus: Enter in, enter in//Surrender to the Spirit's call//To die and enter in//Enter in, find peace within//The holy life awaits you, enter in// Verse 2: The conflict still continues//Raging deep within my soul//My spirit wars against my flesh//In a struggle for control//My only hope is full surrender//So with each borrowed breath//I inhale the Spirit's will for me//To die a deeper death//If mourners should lament//Let them weep for those alive//For only when my will is killed//Can my soul survive**

Because we know Jesus as our greatest treasure, by the Lord's mercy, may we together think differently than the world and determine to together know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. Together, let's commune with the Lord, embracing Christ's death and dying for one another so the savoriness of Jesus is tasted all the more in this world.

¹⁰ [Christian Standard Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Php 1:21.